



*Massachusetts English  
Proficiency Assessment (MEPA)*

*Statewide Results:  
Spring 2008*

January 2009  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and  
Secondary Education



This document was prepared by the  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
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Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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## *Commissioner's Foreword*

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to provide you with the statewide results from the spring 2008 Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) tests. MEPA is part of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

Title III of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law requires that states report annually on the performance of limited English proficient (LEP) students and their progress toward achieving English proficiency. In addition, Chapter 386 of the Massachusetts Acts of 2002 (known as *Question 2*) requires English language learners in Massachusetts to participate in assessments of English language proficiency. The MEPA program is administered in order to comply with these state and federal assessment requirements, and to:

- help determine the level of English proficiency of LEP students;
- measure student, school, and district performance on the state's learning standards as detailed in the *English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners*;
- improve student achievement and classroom instruction by providing diagnostic feedback with respect to the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Only LEP students in grades 3–12 were required to participate in MEPA-Reading/Writing (MEPA-R/W) in spring 2008. Beginning in spring 2009, all Massachusetts LEP students in grades K–12 whose education is publicly funded must participate in the MEPA.

This report summarizes the overall results for more than 30,000 LEP students who participated in the spring 2008 MEPA-R/W tests. A brief summary and comparison of student performance on MEPA tests administered in spring 2005 through spring 2007 is also included. Each school and district should review its Student Information Management System (SIMS) reports and the MEPA participation requirements to ensure that all students reported as LEP participate in these important tests, as required.

I acknowledge the continuing work of educators to teach English language skills to LEP students so they can successfully transition to English-language academic instruction.

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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## I. Executive Summary of 2008 MEPA Results

- In March 2008, 32,469 limited English proficiency (LEP) students in Massachusetts in grades 3–12 participated in the fifth administration of the MEPA.
- Results show that LEP students in general continue to make progress in learning reading and writing skills in English, particularly in grade spans 5–6 and 7–8, where notable improvements are shown from the previous year. The results show less improvement in grades 9–12. There was a decrease of one percentage point for results of students in grades 3–4.
- As has been the case since MEPA tests were first administered in 2005, LEP students in earlier grade spans are most likely to reach higher levels of proficiency. This year, for example, 53 percent of tested students in grades 3–4 achieved a score of *Transitioning*, the highest performance level, compared with 46 percent in grades 5–6; 38 percent in grades 7–8; and 35 percent in grades 9–12.
- More students took the MEPA tests in 2008 than in any previous year. However, the participation rates for 2008 were below acceptable levels, ranging from 93 percent in the elementary grades to 85 percent among high school students. In 2008, for the first time, the Department used official enrollment data from the Student Information Management System (SIMS) to verify that all students reported by their districts as LEP took a MEPA test. These data indicate that approximately 1,600 students who were identified as LEP in SIMS and were enrolled in grades 3–12 in March 2008, did *not* participate in testing, as required.
- Progress reports on the level of attainment of English by LEP students indicate that younger English language learners are more likely to make progress in acquiring English than are older students, and that ELL students make the most progress in their second or third year in Massachusetts schools. ELL students are least likely to make progress during their first year in Massachusetts.

## II. Background

The spring 2008 MEPA program consisted of two separate assessments.

1. The MEPA-R/W assessed reading and writing knowledge and skills. All LEP students in grades 3–12 were required to participate in the MEPA-R/W. The reading and writing tests consisted of three test sessions of increasing language complexity. Each student participated in two sessions of both reading and writing. Schools made separate decisions about which two sessions a student would take and were instructed to consider the Proficiency Level Descriptors in the *English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners* to evaluate which two sessions best matched the student's needs.
2. The Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O) assessed listening and speaking skills and abilities. All LEP students in grades K–12 were required to participate in the MELA-O. The MELA-O is an observational assessment in which LEP students are observed in their classroom while participating in everyday classroom activities. Using the MELA-O Scoring Matrix (a holistic scoring guide used by educators to determine

students' speaking and listening skills), a qualified MELA-O administrator assessed each LEP student individually.

The two assessments together are designed to measure the range of performance identified by the four MEPA Performance Levels: *Beginning* (B), *Early Intermediate* (EI), *Intermediate* (I), and *Transitioning* (T). The MEPA is administered twice during the school year, once in the fall as a baseline assessment for all newly enrolled LEP students, and again in the spring for all enrolled LEP students (or as a baseline for new LEP students arriving after the fall administration).

All MEPA-R/W test items are aligned with the standards identified in the *English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners*. The MEPA-R/W was developed for LEP students in grade spans 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, and 9–12. The MELA-O Scoring Matrix is used for all LEP students in grades K–12.

### III. Summary of Statewide MEPA Participation Rates

#### A. Number of LEP Students Taking MEPA in 2005–2008

MEPA participation rates summarized below are based on SIMS enrollment data for students in grades 3–12 who participated in all four MEPA assessment areas: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

In spring 2008, 32,469 LEP students participated in MEPA, an increase of approximately one percent over the spring 2007 total of 32,044. Participation by students in grade spans 3–4, 5–6, and 9–12 increased from spring 2007 to spring 2008, while the number of students participating in grade span 7–8 decreased slightly compared with participation in spring 2007.

<b>Table 1</b> <b>Number of LEP Students Statewide Participating in MEPA (2005-2008)</b> <b>by Years of Enrollment<sup>1</sup></b>					
	<b>Grades 3–4</b>	<b>Grades 5–6</b>	<b>Grades 7–8</b>	<b>Grades 9–12</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Spring 2008</b>					
First Year	1,103	1,044	1,122	2,161	
Second Year	956	911	928	1,943	
Third Year	1,029	794	851	1,662	
Fourth Year	3,494	600	541	1,145	
Fifth Year or More	3,437	3,786	2,199	2,583	
<b>All Students</b>	<b>10,050</b>	<b>7,163</b>	<b>5,680</b>	<b>9,576</b>	<b>32,469</b>
<b>Spring 2007</b>					
First Year	1,325	1,207	1,294	2,362	
Second Year	999	993	972	2,052	
Third Year	937	767	698	1,451	
Fourth Year	3,296	557	523	972	
Fifth Year or More	3,357	3,274	2,284	2,463	
<b>All Students</b>	<b>9,962</b>	<b>6,851</b>	<b>5,833</b>	<b>9,398</b>	<b>32,044</b>
<b>Spring 2006</b>					
First Year	1,044	1,021	936	2,065	
Second Year	1,006	885	970	1,934	
Third Year or More	7,693	4,685	4,017	5,529	
<b>All Students</b>	<b>9,754</b>	<b>6,601</b>	<b>5,934</b>	<b>9,553</b>	<b>31,842</b>
<b>Spring 2005</b>					
First Year	1,024	897	964	1,789	
Second Year	937	802	907	1,852	
Third Year or More	6,999	4,906	4,033	5,750	
<b>All Students</b>	<b>9,046</b>	<b>6,666</b>	<b>5,940</b>	<b>9,565</b>	<b>31,217</b>
<sup>1</sup> Numbers may not equal total shown for “All Students” because the number of years of enrollment was not available for some students (less than 1 percent).					

## B. Percent of LEP Students Taking MEPA in 2005–2008

Based on SIMS enrollment data for LEP students, there was a significant decrease in the percentage of LEP students who took spring 2008 MEPA tests compared with previous administrations. In spring 2008, more than 1,600 LEP students did *not* participate in MEPA, as required, and were reported as absent. MEPA participation in spring 2008 decreased by three percentage points for grade span 3–4; two percentage points for grade span 5–6; and four percentage points for grade spans 7–8 and 9–12 when compared with participation rates in spring 2007.

Table 2 below provides information on the percentage of enrolled LEP students in grades 3–12 who participated in the MEPA tests in spring 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, by the number of years of enrollment in Massachusetts schools.

<b>Table 2</b>				
<b>Percent of LEP Students Participating in MEPA (2005-2008)</b>				
	<b>Grades 3–4</b>	<b>Grades 5–6</b>	<b>Grades 7–8</b>	<b>Grades 9–12</b>
<b>Spring 2008</b>				
First Year	92	93	95	92
Second Year	94	93	96	92
Third Year	93	95	97	90
Fourth Year	94	91	92	86
Fifth Year or More	93	92	88	74
<b>All Students</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Spring 2007</b>				
First Year	98	98	98	95
Second Year	95	97	98	95
Third Year	96	97	97	92
Fourth Year	97	96	95	91
Fifth Year or More	95	94	94	81
<b>All Students</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Spring 2006</b>				
First Year	98	97	95	93
Second Year	97	96	97	94
Third Year or More	96	95	94	88
<b>All Students</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Spring 2005</b>				
First Year	97	98	98	95
Second Year	97	97	97	96
Third Year or More	96	96	94	91
<b>All Students</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>92</b>

## IV. Summary of Spring 2008 Statewide MEPA Performance Results

MEPA results for each grade span for the years 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 are summarized on the following pages.



## A. Summary of Results for Grade Span 3–4

In 2008, the average scaled score for grade span 3–4 was 370. This has remained the average scaled score for grade span 3–4 since 2006. The number of students performing at the *Intermediate* level increased by three percentage points from 2007; the number of students performing at the *Beginning* level dropped two percentage points from 2007. The percentage of students performing at the *Beginning* level (8 percent) was the lowest since 2005.

Table 3 Statewide MEPA Results (2005–2008): Grade Span 3–4						
	Number of Students Tested <sup>2</sup>	Average Scaled Score	Percent of Students at Each Performance Level <sup>1</sup>			
			<i>Beginning</i>	<i>Early Intermediate</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Transitioning</i>
Spring 2008						
First Year	1,103	337	46	18	20	17
Second Year	956	360	13	21	30	36
Third Year	1,029	372	5	12	28	55
Fourth Year	3,494	374	2	9	33	55
Fifth Year or More	3,437	379	1	6	26	67
All Students	10,050	370	8	11	28	53
Spring 2007						
First Year	1,325	337	46	18	18	18
Second Year	999	362	15	16	28	41
Third Year	937	371	7	12	28	53
Fourth Year	3,296	376	2	9	29	60
Fifth Year or More	3,357	379	2	8	24	67
All Students	9,962	370	10	11	25	54
Spring 2006						
First Year	1,044	331	53	19	17	11
Second Year	1,006	356	18	20	31	30
Third Year or More	7,693	377	2	8	29	61
All Students	9,754	370	9	10	28	52
Spring 2005						
First Year	1,024	328	59	16	16	10
Second Year	937	355	19	21	30	30
Third Year or More	6,999	375	3	9	28	59
All Students	9,046	368	11	11	27	50

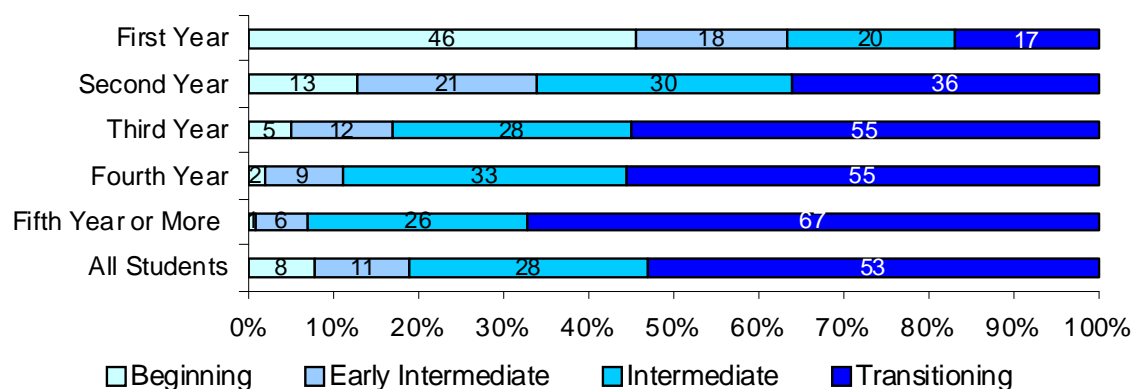
<sup>1</sup> Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers may not equal total shown for “All Students” because the number of years of enrollment was not available for some students (less than 1 percent)

<sup>1</sup> Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers may not equal total shown for “All Students” because the number of years of enrollment was not available for some students (less than 1 percent).

**Percent of Students at Each Performance Level:  
Grade Span 3–4, Spring 2008**



## B. Summary of Results for Grade Span 5–6

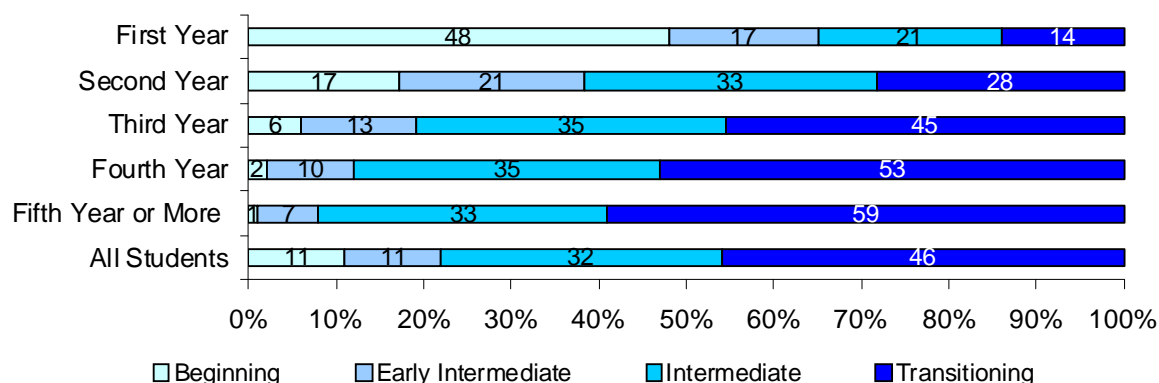
The average scaled score of 366 for grade span 5–6 represents an increase of four percentage points over 2007. The percent of students performing at the *Transitioning* level increased from 41 percent in 2007 to 46 percent in 2008. The percentage of students performing at the *Beginning* level decreased from 14 percent in 2007 to 11 percent in 2008.

Table 4 Statewide MEPA Results (2005–2008): Grade Span 5–6						
	Number of Students Tested <sup>2</sup>	Average Scaled Score	Percent of Students at Each Performance Level <sup>1</sup>			
			<i>Beginning</i>	<i>Early Intermediate</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Transitioning</i>
Spring 2008						
First Year	1,044	334	48	17	21	14
Second Year	911	354	17	21	33	28
Third Year	794	368	6	13	35	45
Fourth Year	600	373	2	10	35	53
Fifth Year or More	3,786	376	1	7	33	59
All Students	7,163	366	11	11	32	46
Spring 2007						
First Year	1,207	336	47	18	21	15
Second Year	993	353	19	23	33	26
Third Year	767	365	9	15	35	41
Fourth Year	557	371	4	10	37	50
Fifth Year or More	3,274	374	3	8	35	54
All Students	6,851	362	14	13	32	41
Spring 2006						
First Year	1,021	330	54	18	19	10
Second Year	885	350	25	19	32	24
Third Year or More	4,685	372	3	9	35	52
All Students	6,601	363	14	12	32	42
Spring 2005						
First Year	897	325	63	14	14	9
Second Year	802	348	25	23	32	21
Third Year or More	4,906	371	5	10	35	51
All Students	6,666	362	15	12	31	41

<sup>1</sup> Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers may not equal total shown for “All Students” because the number of years of enrollment was not available for some students (less than 1 percent).

**Percent of Students at Each Performance Level:  
Grade Span 5–6, Spring 2008**

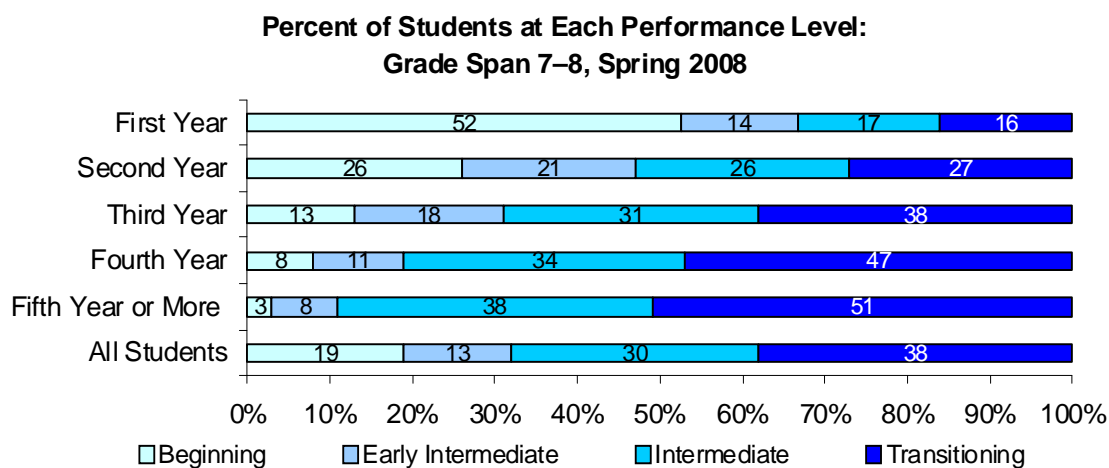


## C. Summary of Results for Grade Span 7–8

The average scaled score of 359 for grade span 7–8 was two points higher than the average scaled score in 2007. The percentage of students performing at the *Transitioning* level increased from 35 percent in 2007 to 38 percent in 2008. The percentage of students performing at the *Beginning* level decreased by one percentage point from 2007 to 2008.

Table 5 Statewide MEPA Results (2005–2008): Grade Span 7–8						
	Number of Students Tested <sup>2</sup>	Average Scaled Score	Percent of Students at Each Performance Level <sup>1</sup>			
			<i>Beginning</i>	<i>Early Intermediate</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Transitioning</i>
Spring 2008						
First Year	1,122	334	52	14	17	16
Second Year	928	351	26	21	26	27
Third Year	851	361	13	18	31	38
Fourth Year	541	368	8	11	34	47
Fifth Year or More	2,199	373	3	8	38	51
All Students	5,680	359	19	13	30	38
Spring 2007						
First Year	1,294	334	51	15	18	16
Second Year	972	349	26	22	29	23
Third Year	698	361	12	18	36	34
Fourth Year	523	368	5	14	37	44
Fifth Year or More	2,284	371	4	11	36	49
All Students	5,833	357	20	15	31	35
Spring 2006						
First Year	936	331	57	13	16	14
Second Year	970	346	33	18	27	23
Third Year or More	4,017	370	7	11	32	51
All Students	5,934	360	19	12	29	40
Spring 2005						
First Year	964	325	62	15	14	9
Second Year	907	345	31	21	28	20
Third Year or More	4,033	367	8	12	37	43
All Students	5,940	357	21	14	32	34

<sup>1</sup> Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.  
<sup>2</sup> Numbers may not equal total shown for “All Students” because the number of years of enrollment was not available for some students (less than 1 percent).



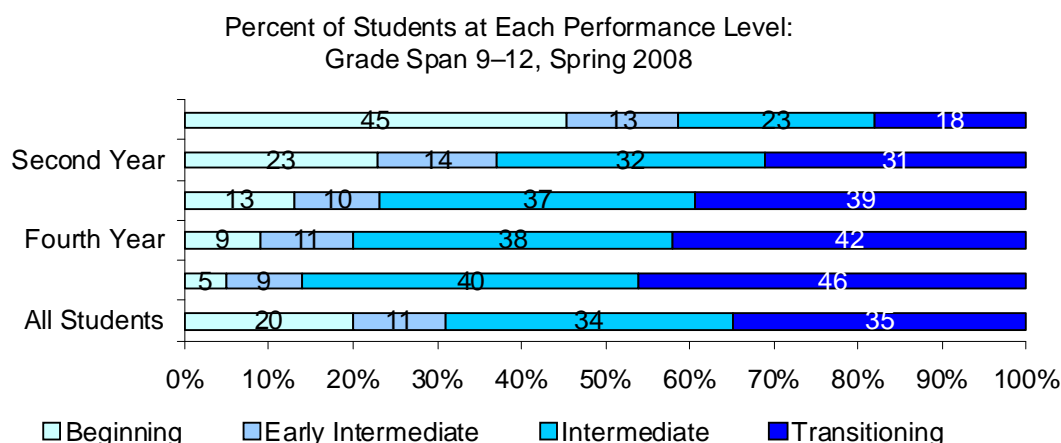
## D. Summary of Results for Grade Span 9–12

The average scaled score for grade span 9–12 increased by one point, from 356 in 2007 to 357 in 2008. While the percentage of students performing at the *Transitioning* level remained unchanged between 2007 and 2008, the percentage of students performing at the *Intermediate* level increased from 31 percent in 2007 to 34 percent in 2008. For students at the *Beginning* level, the percentage rate dropped two points from 2007 to 2008.

Table 6 Statewide MEPA Results (2005–2008): Grade Span 9–12						
	Number of Students Tested <sup>2</sup>	Average Scaled Score	Percent of Students at Each Performance Level <sup>1</sup>			
			<i>Beginning</i>	<i>Early Intermediate</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Transitioning</i>
Spring 2008						
First Year	2,161	338	45	13	23	18
Second Year	1,943	354	23	14	32	31
Third Year	1,662	362	13	10	37	39
Fourth Year	1,145	365	9	11	38	42
Fifth Year or More	2,583	369	5	9	40	46
All Students	9,576	357	20	11	34	35
Spring 2007						
First Year	2,362	339	43	14	23	20
Second Year	2,052	353	24	15	31	30
Third Year	1,451	362	14	12	34	40
Fourth Year	972	365	11	10	37	42
Fifth Year or More	2,463	368	8	8	37	47
All Students	9,398	356	22	12	31	35
Spring 2006						
First Year	2,065	334	51	13	20	15
Second Year	1,934	350	27	14	31	28
Third Year or More	5,529	364	12	10	37	41
All Students	9,553	355	23	12	32	33
Spring 2005						
First Year	1,789	336	49	14	19	18
Second Year	1,852	351	25	16	31	28
Third Year or More	5,750	363	12	12	36	40
All Students	9,565	355	22	13	32	33

<sup>1</sup> Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers may not equal total shown for “All Students” because the number of years of enrollment was not available for some students (less than 1 percent).



## V. Summary of Progress Attaining English Proficiency 2007–2008

Table 7 on the following page displays the number of students making progress in acquiring English language skills by the number of years they have attended a Massachusetts school. The data in Table 7 indicate that younger English language learners are more likely to make progress acquiring English than are older students, and that English language learners generally make the most progress in their second or third year. The only exception is among fifth-year students taking the grade span 3–4 test for whom progress exceeded second-year students by 3 percentage points. ELL students are least likely to make progress during their first year.

The percentages of students making progress displayed in Table 7 were calculated based on a comparison of the MEPA test scores of LEP students who participated in all portions of the MEPA-R/W and MELA-O in spring 2008 and their baseline performance level, if one was available, either from the spring 2007 or fall 2007 MEPA.

Progress is defined as follows:

- For students whose baseline MEPA score is from the *same* grade-span test as in spring 2008, the Department has defined progress toward acquiring English language proficiency as advancing by two or more performance level steps on the MEPA.
- For students whose baseline MEPA score is from a *different* grade-span test than in spring 2008, progress is defined as advancing one or more steps, since the level of difficulty of each successive grade-span test increases relative to the preceding grade-span test.
- Students with baseline MEPA scores at the *Transitioning* level who again score at *Transitioning* in spring 2008 are also considered to have made progress.

**Table 7**  
**Statewide Percentage of LEP Students Making Progress by Number of Years**  
**in a Massachusetts School**

	Number of Students Tested <sup>1</sup>	Percent Making Progress
<b>Grades 3 &amp; 4</b>		
First Year	761	54.3%
Second Year	782	73.5%
Third Year	944	77.0%
Fourth Year	3,254	65.8%
Fifth Year or More	3,149	76.5%
<b>All Students</b>	8,890	70.5%
<b>Grades 5 &amp; 6</b>		
First Year	685	49.1%
Second Year	588	78.4%
Third Year	739	74.2%
Fourth Year	565	68.8%
Fifth Year or More	3,461	66.1%
<b>All Students<sup>2</sup></b>	6,039	66.6%
<b>Grades 7 &amp; 8</b>		
First Year	735	47.5%
Second Year	615	73.3%
Third Year	812	69.7%
Fourth Year	514	66.0%
Fifth Year or More	1,986	62.4%
<b>All Students<sup>2</sup></b>	4,665	63.2%
<b>Grades 9–12</b>		
First Year	1,361	46.4%
Second Year	1,297	66.5%
Third Year	1,586	62.7%
Fourth Year	1,059	58.1%
Fifth Year or More	2,258	55.2%
<b>All Students<sup>2</sup></b>	7,587	57.5%
<b>All Grades</b>		
First Year	3,542	48.8%
Second Year	3,282	71.6%
Third Year	4,081	69.5%
Fourth Year	5,392	64.6%
Fifth Year or More	10,854	66.2%
<b>All Students<sup>2</sup></b>	27,181	64.7%

1. This figure represents the number of students tested in spring 2008 who were also tested in spring or fall 2007.
2. Numbers may not equal total shown for “All Students” because the number of years of enrollment was not available for some students (less than 1 percent).

## VI. Appendices

### Appendix A. Defining “First Year of Enrollment” for LEP Students

Beginning in 2007, the definition of a “student in the first year of enrollment” was revised from “enrolled in a U.S. school for less than a year” to “enrolled in a Massachusetts school after March 1 of the previous school year,” as reported by districts in SIMS.

### Appendix B. MEPA Scaled Score Conversion to Performance Levels

Four performance levels are used to report MEPA results: *Beginning*, *Early Intermediate*, *Intermediate*, and *Transitioning*. The overall MEPA scaled score range is 300 to 400, with scaled score “cut points” shown in Table 8 for each grade span test.

Table 8 MEPA Scaled Score “Cut Points” for Each Performance Level				
Grade Span Test	Scaled Score Range	<i>Early Intermediate</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Transitioning</i>
3–4	300–400	325	349	375
5–6	300–400	325	346	375
7–8	300–400	325	346	375
9–12	300–400	325	343	375

## Appendix C. MEPA Performance Level Descriptors

<b>Table 9</b> <b>MEPA Performance Level Descriptors</b>	
<b>Performance Level</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b><i>Beginning</i></b>	<p>The student at this performance level is starting to develop the skills that will lead to effective communication in written and spoken English. A student performing at this level typically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes simple written words and phrases</li> <li>• Writes basic words or phrases, with frequent errors</li> <li>• Speaks using basic words or phrases, with frequent errors</li> <li>• Understands basic spoken vocabulary or phrases</li> </ul>
<b><i>Early Intermediate</i></b>	<p>The student at this performance level is developing skills that will lead to effective and complete communication in English. A student performing at this level typically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes simple written words, phrases, and sentences, and reads and comprehends below grade-level texts</li> <li>• Writes short paragraphs with limited control of standard English conventions</li> <li>• Speaks using common words and simple phrases; word choice is often inappropriate or incorrect</li> <li>• Understands basic spoken vocabulary and phrases with frequent need for clarification</li> </ul>
<b><i>Intermediate</i></b>	<p>The student at this performance level demonstrates increasing skills in using and understanding English. Oral and written communication, although somewhat inconsistent, is solid and usually understandable. A student performing at this level typically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes common written words and some academic words, and comprehends simple grade-level texts</li> <li>• Writes short, simple compositions with partial control of standard English conventions</li> <li>• Speaks using common words and phrases and basic grammar and sentence structure; uses complex language structures but with occasional errors</li> <li>• Understands most oral communication, with some need for clarification</li> </ul>
<b><i>Transitioning</i></b>	<p>The student at this performance level has achieved age-appropriate basic fluency in English, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. A student performing at this level typically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes most common and academic words, and reads and comprehends moderately difficult grade-level texts</li> <li>• Writes short compositions demonstrating general control of standard English conventions</li> <li>• Speaks using appropriate and correct words, phrases, and expressions, as well as basic and complex grammar and sentence structures</li> <li>• Understands extended and prolonged oral communication, with little or no need for clarification</li> </ul>